

An Essay
on
Matter and Spirit
with special application to the lower
animals.

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It has frequently been asserted that man is a three fold compound, consisting of body, soul and spirit: that the body is formed of gross corporeal particles; that the spirit is pure intelligence; and that the soul is a kind of ethereal vehicle, in which the spirit is enclosed in order to its union with the grosser compages of the body. Such is the notion of body, soul and spirit.

Perhaps an inability to comprehend, how pure spirit could be immediately connected with particles so gross as those of which the body is composed, may be among the primary causes of this theory of man: And hence the conception of this ethereal vehicle which is presumed to act as a medium between these two distant natures.

That we cannot conceive how two natures, so physically distant from each other, as matter and spirit, can be immediately united, is a truth which I readily admit; but I fear that the admission of an ethereal vehicle, will give the difficulty no solution. The sublimation of matter can never destroy any of its permanent properties, nor in any wise change the identity of its nature. Let any given portion of matter pass either through an alembic of alchemy, or an alembic of the mind, the same conclusion must inevitably follow. There can be nothing but matter which refinement can leave behind, and there is nothing but matter which refinement can take away. The only changes which refinement can produce



in matter, are, an alteration of its specific quantity, or a new arrangement of its component parts; but how this new arrangement of parts, or alteration in quantity, can render it more capable of an immediate alliance with pure spirit, I confess myself wholly unable to discern. The rarest atmosphere with which we are acquainted, can be no nearer in point of nature to pure spirit, than a rock of adamant; and we can no more conceive how an alliance can be effected with the one than with the other. The union of two distinct natures, which in themselves have no relation to one another, can never be produced by any thing in the natures themselves, and can be ascribable only to the power of God, to whom all things are possible.

However much refined the soul or ethereal vehicle may be, certain it is, that it must be either matter or Spirit; if the former, we are exactly at the same loss to account for its union with pure spirit, as we are for that of the body, if we suppose no such thing as an ethereal vehicle to exist. If, on the contrary, we suppose the soul to be spirit, the same difficulty meets us in another stage; for although we might be able to assign some reasons how a spiritual substance could be enclosed within a spiritual vehicle, yet how a spiritual vehicle can unite with the gross matter of our bodies, I fear we shall feel ourselves rather at a loss to say. The admission, therefore, of a third principle in the compound man, appears in my view to add to the embarrassments which are necessarily included in the union, without affording us a single ray of light, or removing a single obstacle.

Among those properties which are necessary to the existence of matter may be included its solidity, its magnitude and figure. Without these distinguishing properties, we can

form no conception of any thing that is material, and in what subject so ever we find these properties, from that discovery we denominate this substance to be material. But matter was never admitted to possess either perception or sensation, and wherever they are found to exist, they plainly demonstrate the existence of some principle in which they inhere, to which they belong, and from which they are inseparable. To matter in any form or mode of existence they do not, nor cannot belong, and therefore are inherent only in the principle called spirit. These two substances have their beings independent of each other, having properties which are totally distinct, and which they cannot partake in common with one another. —

The refinement of any substance cannot give to it a quality which it does not naturally possess. Matter, under any modification, is but matter still. No matter, therefore can be refined beyond the boundaries of its nature.

That principle which exists in the lower animals in which perception and sensation are inherent cannot be matter; for that which is physically incapable of perceiving and feeling in any state, must be necessarily incapable in every state. For if no new powers be added, its modification can only affect the arrangement of its component parts, while the physical state of its nature must remain the same.

Matter under every modification must be formed of parts, and though united together, they are still the same; and if a power to produce perception and sensation under any modification be supposed to exist, and be transmissible to the lower animals so as to enable them to perceive and feel, it must result from the particular arrangements of its component parts. But,

Every whole must be formed of those parts which are necessary to its existence, and to conceive that perception and sensation can result from any modification of these parts, is to conceive that the whole possesses a power that all and every part of which it is composed are wholly destitute. That the whole, which is formed only of certain parts, is capable of communicating what it neither possesses, nor has received, or in other language, that it is capable of producing of the powers of perception and sensation, and yet be incapable at the same time.

That modification is nothing but an arrangement of parts, is a position which no one will dispute. And to suppose perception and sensation to result from a mere arrangement, is to suppose that those parts which are thus arranged, have communicated to the arrangement of themselves, a potential quality which they did not possess.

The external senses destined to bring man and animals into communication with the external world may be divided into two sorts. By means of two of the senses we are acquainted with external bodies, when they immediately touch the sentient organs. This is the case with touch smell and taste. The other senses perceive remoter bodies.

Man and the lower animals stand on the same footing with regard to the external senses, and they have been given by the author of being for the same purposes.

The means of communicating ideas to the human mind from the outward world, are not more numerous, and in many instances not so perfect, as are found in some of the lower animals.

If the brain be the organ of the mind in man, as is now pretty generally admitted, notwithstanding the numerous theories of physiologists and philosophers that the moral sentiments are derived from various viscera, or from



the nerves of the abdomen and thorax; the doctrine as applied to man, can by easy transition pass down in the scale of being to all creatures from the elephant to the insect.

In new born children, animal life is confined to spontaneous motions, — to the perception of hunger and thirst, to the sensation of pain, and perhaps of pleasure, and to the external senses. In these particulars, they are not superior to the lower animals; but by degrees the inclinations and propensities become more numerous and more energetic, and children acquire some determinate ideas of external objects, and ultimately become acquainted with them: improved organization is manifestly the cause of this improvement and advance in knowledge: But if the growth of the organs be incomplete, the manifestations of the faculties are equally defection. A brain too small is accompanied with imbecility.

In general the heads of idiots are either too small, or the brain is affected by disease. Sometimes imbecility is not general but merely partial. Instances have appeared where the inferior parts of the brain were favourably developed, but the foreheads exceedingly low, and in whom the improvement of the superior parts of the brain could not take place, the result of which was the possession of functions of the inferior parts, strongly marked by the recollection of names, numbers, historical facts etc.; and the repetition of them in a mechanical manner; but the functions of the superior parts of the brain, as comparison, reflection, judgement etc. were wholly absent.

Would not such an illustration determine the fact that there is an intimate relation between the manifestations of the faculties and the organization, and that the former must depend on the latter.

As my object in the sequel is to apply these propositions, apparently unconnected, but all bearing upon the point I have in view with relation to the lower animals, I will here introduce the views of Doctor Spurzheim on the innateness of the faculties of man for the purpose of exhibiting his judgment on the analogy that subsists in all living beings in their physical constitution. The Dr. proceeds, „Let us examine whether the faculties of animal life, viz those which act consciently, are also innate? Those faculties may be subdivided into four orders: into voluntary motion; into those of the five external senses; into propensities and sentiments; and into the faculties of the understanding. Now when animal life presents any point of contact between man and animals, these common faculties are innate, it is evident that voluntary motion must be considered as innate or given by nature. The functions of the five external senses are also inherent in the nature of man and animals; and these senses exert essentially the same functions in both. No one will attempt to prove that the five senses are the production of our will: their laws are determined by nature, etc. From these considerations it results, that the comparison of man with other beings must be admitted, and cannot be repugnant to our feelings, because we participate of their properties. He, who imagines that such comparisons degrade mankind, should be aware that the greatest natural philosophers, moralists and divines, have maintained the same opinion; as St. Gregorius Nyssenus, St. Augustin, Bonnet, Pascal, Condillae and others. Herder was therefore right in saying, „it is incontestable that all living beings are created conformably to certain laws of analogy.“ (*Ideen zur Geschichte der Philosophie der Menschheit*. Tom. 11. p. 126.) It is only to be



considered that the inferior properties are preserved in the beings of a higher order, modified only by superior faculties. In this manner, man unites all physical, chemical, vegetable and animal laws; and it is only by peculiar faculties that he acquires the character of humanity.

I have still to examine the origin of the propensities, sentiments and intellectual faculties. There are three methods of explaining this matter: man and animals acquire their propensities, sentiments and intellectual faculties, either by external impressions, or by internal causes; and in this latter respect, either one or several general faculties produce all particular faculties; or each special faculty is determined, and given by creation."

It is clear that perception and sensation in the lower animals cannot be mere adventitious acquisitions to that which is essentially material. If one atom of which any being is composed, have not the faculty of perception, neither can another of the same nature. If two atoms be destitute of this faculty, four must be equally so; and if we proceed onward in addition the same conclusions will invariably hold good.

The modification of mere matter, whether the particles of which any given portion is composed, be the same in nature, or diverse from one another, can never communicate to that portion, a power, which neither particle possessed; and all the modifications which any quantity of matter is capable of undergoing, from an atom to a world, can never give to any material substance, a single quality, which is not to be found, either inhering in, or resulting from, the minutest particle in that supposed portion. And the result is, that matter, under every form in which we can view it, is not only incapable in its own nature, of sensation,

but can never admit a sentient quality to incorporate with its identity.

That many of the animals and creatures known to man possess intelligence no one will deny: the instances are so numerous, and recorded on such unquestionable authority, that it would be most unreasonable to doubt the facts with which we are furnished. Very many could be enumerated from anecdotal books; but as personal observation will suit my present purpose better than borrowed proofs, and as „seeing is believing,“ I will illustrate the point I have in view by stating facts which I have ocular demonstration to establish, and as such cannot be gainsayed.

In a town in Africa I resided in a house, the proprietor of which had a dog which accompanied his master every morning at 10 o'clock to his office, about half a mile distance from home; and immediately on seeing his master enter his place of business, the animal returned to the residence. A few minutes before 4 o'clock he punctually proceeded to the door of his master's office, and there waited for his appearance to accompany him home. On Saturday, official business was over at 2 o'clock, and the dog distinguished between the days of the week, and always took his post at the early hour to be in readiness for his master. This animal exhibited no signs whatever of preparedness to leave home on Sunday morning, such as was observable on weekdays. It is foreign to my purpose to attempt an explication: I merely state the facts for the purposes I shall here after deduce.

I have frequently observed that chickens would hasten to the protection of their parents wings when a bird of prey was discovered hovering in the air, even at a distance

that the human sight could scarcely penetrate, but which the hen's clear vision would immediately detect.

I have known from observation that hawks would not approach premises, though strongly incited to do so by the presence of prey, on perceiving a man with a fowling piece upon his arm walking about.

I have seen pigeons come to the rescue of one of their cote when pursued by a hawk, and by flying above the enemy, and pouncing down repeatedly and pecking him would thus tire him out, until he gave up the pursuit.

Every one, more or less, must be familiar with circumstances which would fully establish the facts, (or rather corroborate them by similar circumstances) that I have here stated.

On what principle can they be accounted for? Creatures exhibiting such signs of intelligence, cannot but possess a principle in which inhere faculties that only can exist in an immaterial substance. Matter is not susceptible of such qualities.

That matter itself is indifferent to motion or rest, is undeniable from the instance given by Mr. Locke. „If God“, says he, „were to place any given portion of matter beyond the influence of all corporeal being, where nothing could either attract or repel it; and were to put this body in motion, it is certain that under these circumstances it must move for ever: and if God were in this case to deprive it of motion, it must be for ever in a state of rest“. In this case, all motion must be impressed on all material bodies by some foreign impulse: And if we were to suppose that nothing but material substances existed, it would be impossible for any being to move, unless it were impelled thereto by this impulsions. That most animals, if



not all, have the power of motion, cannot be denied: But if animals be wholly material, and nothing which is material can move but by external impressions; it will follow that animals must have this power and yet not this power at the same time.

No being without intelligence can associate together the ideas of past and future, and discover the relations which subsist between them. But this association of ideas must have been possessed by the animals to which I have referred; for the conduct exhibited by them was the result of past experience, and the lively apprehensions of present and future consequences; therefore certain animals are intelligent; and their actions cannot be produced by external impulse. But as all matter must move from this external cause, and as external impulse is incompatible with the idea of intelligence in the same object, and as it is contradictory to suppose an object to be intelligent, and yet impelled, it must follow, from the power that animals have of associating ideas, that the inner principle which they possess must be immaterial. —

The differences that may exist in the physical constitution of immaterial substances cannot be investigated. The distinction therefore between that which is in man and in the lower animals we can form no idea of. The internal real essence of substances is to us totally unknown. God has rendered such knowledge incommunicable to man: either by placing this real essence too remote for human researches, or by laying an embargo on the faculties which explore. To communicate to us the real knowledge of essences, would, in all probability, be to strike us from that rank which we now hold in the vast chain of being: and even while the knowledge which we now aim at were

communicated to us, we should, in that advanced state of being which we now attempt in vain to explore, behold the prospect still opening to our view, and, beyond the boundaries of that superior circle of knowledge, other real essences might give sufficient evidence of their existence, which we might attempt the comprehension of, with as little success as we now have, in attempting to find the real essences of material or spiritual substances.

An attempt to establish the point that the lower animals are actuated by an immaterial principle may be objected to on the ground that it would elevate them to the rank of accountable beings, and thus be brought under the moral government of the Divine being; but this would be entering upon the subject in a form not contemplated by this essay, and which is beyond the ken of the human intellect: the main design is to exhibit the probability, if not the certainty that the immaterial principle which necessarily exists in the lower orders of creatures, may survive the death of their bodies, and exist in a state of consciousness, and under circumstances, as the infinitely wise God shall see fit to appoint to them, and until the reasoning adopted in this paper be proved to be fallacious, or based on false premises, no amount of difficulty which the consequences might exhibit can militate against the suggested perpetuity of animal life in every form; for that which infinite wisdom and power thought fit to call into existence, cannot be incongruous to the same wisdom to continue for ever.

If the principle which actuates and directs to action, and in which is inherent perception and sensation, and the faculty of thought be not material, and from the preceding arguments, it appears that it cannot be; there is no other

conclusion to arrive at, than that it must be immaterial, and consequently simple in its own nature, and can have no parts, and what has no parts, can never lose them, and what has nothing which it can lose, can admit nothing to incorporate with its essence, while its simple nature remains; and what has nothing which it can either acquire or lose, can never be affected by modification. And to suppose an essence which has nothing that it can either acquire or lose to be capable of perishing, we must first suppose an annihilation of its simplicity previous to the annihilation of its being, which includes this contradiction that it exists and does not exist at the same time. A principle which continues simple, must be the same to-day that it was yesterday, and must be exactly the same to-morrow for the same reason; and while this physical simplicity remains, it must continue the same for ever.





